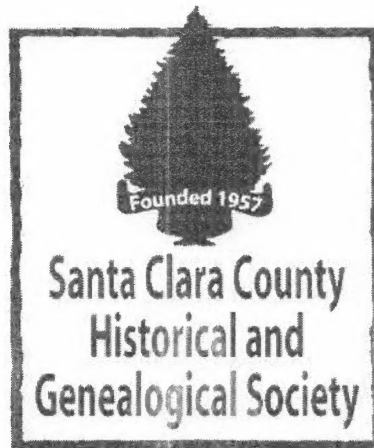


Early Days of Lexington [California]

Collected by the Federal Writers' Project, a Works Progress Administration (WPA) Project, 1936

Notes:

- This data was collected by the school children of Lexington
- Original in possession of the Santa Clara County Archives, San Jose, California
- Scanned by the Santa Clara Historical and Genealogical Society



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CLASS II HISTORICAL

EARLY DAYS OF LEXINGTON

(Data collected by schoolchildren of Lexington)

Lexington was the first town in our district, having been started in 1856 as a stage station and lumber center. It was lumbering which attracted the Logan and Henning families here from Lexington, Missouri. These two families claim to have laid out and named the town Lexington after their home in the east.

Where the hotel is now at Lexington there was once the old Paddock hotel, a large two story building. There was also a store operated by one commonly known as "Jew Jo". J. W. Lyndon later of the Lyndon Hotel clerked here at that time.

There were several large livery stables at Lexington where the horses which hauled the stages were kept. The stages ran from San Jose to Santa Cruz. The first stop to change horses was at Lexington. This change was necessary because of the long pull over Jones' hill.

Some people of interest around Lexington in the early days were:

Bill Elledrige was the blacksmith and also the bass singer for entertainments.

Sam Long and Jim Woodrow, two teamsters.

Mrs. Smith kept the first and only laundry of Lexington.

Mr. Grant had a saloon in the blacksmithshop.

George N. Adams, pipe manufacturer. (Redwood pipe was used at the mines at Guadalupe and Almaden.)

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S. H. and J. W. Chase, lumber dealers.

W. S. Hall, wheelwright.

Isaac Paddock, blacksmith, hotel keeper, and postmaster.

Scott Hall and Louis Heband, the carpenters of the community made redwood coffins whose lasting qualities have been highly praised by Mrs. Yocco of Los Gatos Cemetery.

SETTLEMENTS OF ALMA

When the railroad came through in the fall of 1878 it brought with it on its first trip, Frank Hebard. Everyone was glad to have Mr. Hebard but the coming of the railroad spelled doom for Lexington. Lexington began to lose in importance and instead the new little town of Alma sprang up. The railroad, which came only as far as Alma, hauled out lumber and also brought many people in, for Alma offered an ideal place for picnics and outdoor recreation, being a perfect paradise for fishermen.

There were three hotels at Alma. One across the tracks was the Oakland House; one at the Tevis gate called the Columbet, and, where the fire station now stands at the beginning of the Oakmont road, was the Forest House.

Mr. Dolder and Mr. Bloz were both storekeepers in Alma before Mr. Osmer came in.

When the new highway went through in 1920 and '21 more and more people began to travel through Alma, but not

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so many stopped there.

The old toll road, or turnpike, had been built by a private corporation.

The toll gate was kept by Mr. Kennedy and later by his daughter Mrs. Demmic.

When they passed a law in Los Gatos prohibiting liquor, Alma was the nearest place where people could get it. At one time there were as many as twelve saloons between Lexington and Alma.

Years ago our beautiful hills began to attract people from the city, and landowners found it worth while to open up their land for settlement.

One of the first of these was Aldercroft Heights, which was the old Stewart and Columbit places.

Later, the Heuter and McKiernan place was opened up and called Redwood Estates. It now boasts a community house, a branch of the county library, a swimming pool, and a tennis court.

About 1926 Chemeketa Park was thrown open for settlement, and soon after Vista Grande was opened too.

Not to be left behind, Mr. Von der Mehden divided his property in 1925 into lots and thus began Oakmont.

INDUSTRIES

1. Lumbering:

The first industry of importance in this region was lumbering.

These hills were then covered with beautiful

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virgin redwoods and many mills were started.

Moody Brothers in Moody Gulch; S. H. and J. W. Chase had one in the Lyndon Gulch. Another at Eva Vista was operated by Mr. McMillan. One of the most interesting was the old Barrow mill just above Alma, where the San Jose Water Company takes out water. This was built by Herb Martin for Buffalo Jones, probably one of the first settlers in this region. Though the mill was built about 1862 the dam still stands, one of the landmarks of early days. The lumber was hauled to San Jose, as well as to the Guadalupe, and Almaden mines by teams. Wood was hauled to the mines for fuel and pickets, stakes, shingles and posts were made. Much material was needed for the fences to enclose the great fields of grain in the valleys. Many picket fences stand throughout the valley as reminders of those busy days of the past.

FRUIT RAISING

As more and more people homesteaded in these beautiful hills, like Eve they realized the tempting qualities of the apple.

The climate and soil seemed to be just suited to produce those of delicious flavor, and so began the family orchards of apples, prunes, pears, peaches and plums. Like Adam, others having tasted this delicious fruit, desired it. Soon the hills, instead of being covered with redwoods, were

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covered with orchards, and with the coming of the railroad, fruit was shipped out by the carloads. The first vineyard in this region was planted near Lexington, by George McMurtry's father in April 1867. Much fruit is still raised but not for great commercial purposes.

OIL DRILLING

According to the early settlers, oil was found in Moddy Gulch as early as 1861.

At about the same time, oil was discovered at Newhall, so there has been some argument as to which was first, both claiming the honor.

At any rate, according to the report of the California Division of mines, Moody Gulch was one of the very first wells of California to produce. Though the yield was small, varying from ten to forty barrels a day, it was enough to make it worth while to ship. In doing this, it was piped across the canyon to a tank which was located where the station at Aldercroft now stands (then called Oil Switch), and was sent from there to Oakland.

Operations ceased about 1910, but recently the Trigonia Oil Company took over the property containing the old Logan and Moody wells and started operations again. It is probable that with careful management the area around the gulch may be made to again produce small wells of commercial value.

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At one time, when Schoffield had the wells, they had a flow of 200 barrels per day, but this lasted only about three months. However, it caused the building of the pipe line and gave great hopes.

MINING

There was a silver mine located right above the falls on Yuhudi Menuhin's property, owned by a man named Misinhamer.

There was also a gold mine up above Aldercroft which is still operating.

Perhaps the first gold was found by the Chinese who were working on the tunnel at Wrights. Many of them spent all their leisure hours looking for nuggets along the creek, and many with success.

HOTEL BUSINESS

The hotel business was also a prosperous one in days gone by. This vicinity boasting of several.

Among the early settlers are:

1. Mr. Frank Hebard who was born here, his father having come from Wisconsin during the gold rush. Mr. Hebard bears the distinction of having ridden on the first train that came into Alma.

2. Mr. Charles Murdock who came here when a baby with his parents from the east, after spending many years in the southern part of the state, has decided that there is no

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place like home and now is beautifully located on the old homestead.

3. Mr. John Logan, whose father came here in 1856, homesteading on what is now the Biddle place, was born in 1858. John Logan learned considerable about oil from the Moody Gulch workings and went south to enter the oil business in 1904, but in 1929 the longing for his old home struck him and today he lives in Los Gatos.

4. Mrs. Elizabeth Henning Hall, who came with her father and mother to Lexington in 1858, was born in 1854. She has the distinction of having gone to the old school when it first started, and being the daughter of the man who laid out and helped name Lexington.

5. Another of the early settlers still living is Susan M. Logan. She was born in Santa Clara County in 1854. In 1899 she went to the southern part of the state but, like her brother, has been lured back to our beautiful hills to spend her last days.

6. Among the first settlers we find the Van Lone family, who came to California in 1853, settling in Lexington vicinity in 1858. Of this family Walter, Elizabeth and George are still living. Walter lives in Los Gatos; Elizabeth, now Mrs. Laddick, lives above Holy City, and George is a familiar figure along the creek, always on the lookout for the good of the San Jose Water Company. School boys with fishing poles or a desire to swim, and ambitious flume

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walkers, are also on the lookout for George Van Lone.

7. Mr. Xavier Weltz came here in 1882, filing on a homestead. He surveyed the Soda Springs Road, and has served on the school board of our district, being one of the members when the school site was moved. His son George, one of our present members, has been serving for 12 consecutive years.

8. Mr. George Osmer arrived here in 1889 to help Mr. Dolder, his brother-in-law, in the store. Two years later Mr. Osmer, together with a partner (Mr. Bohme) purchased the store. In a short time Mr. Osmer bought out his partner and has continued in this store ever since, making forty-five years in the same business. He has also been postmaster all of this time.

9. Mrs. May Smith, also an early settler, came here in 1895 and bought her present home, where she then managed a well paying laundry business.

10. Mrs. George Osmer came here before her husband did, she having the distinction of being the first of three generations to graduate from Lexington School. Mr. Osmer, her daughters, and granddaughter, are all Lexington graduates. Mrs. Osmer's father, Mr. Henry Steward, with his brother, started the first store in Alma. It was located across the tracks from the depot. This was known as Stewart Brothers' General Store. Located near this store was the Alma Hotel, built by Mr. John Floyd.

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11. A familiar and much loved character of our district is Captain Ferdinand Stolte, who is now nearly 88 years of age. He is always a welcome visitor at school, where he has told many facinating experiences of his life on the sea.

LANDMARKS

One of the land marks of the country around Alma is the world's largest Madrone tree which stands on what was the old Tevis' place. Spreading close to 100 feet of shade, the tree measures 32 feet 10 inches at the "waist" - the narrowest portion of its trunk. It is perfectly symmetrical in shape and over 10 feet in diameter.

The Rundell cemetery, situated near the madrone tree, is so named because in it may be found the graves of many of the Rundell family. Here, too, are the graves of Isaac Paddock, Joseph Foster, and others.

The Hebard cemetery in Idylwild is partly buried in a slide that followed the earthquake of 1906. In it are the graves of Eva, Bert, Francis, and George Hebard, William Van Lone, and some whose gravestones are no longer readable. Little Eva Hebard was the first to be buried here, under a beautiful oak, the site being chosen because she loved to play there. Almost nothing is left of the burial grounds, established by a Dutchman named Anens, between Lexington and Alma.

The dam at Alma is another of the early landmarks.

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There was once a mill there, built by Mr. Martin for the first white man to come to this region. Buffalo Jones had an annoying habit of taking possession of whatever lands were to his liking, whether he had any claim on them or not. This habit got him into much trouble, and he was always on the move to a new place, where he could take more land. Soon after the mill was built he moved away and that was the last that was ever heard of him.

The old flume, part of which was recently torn down, was built by Mr. McMillan to provide power for the old Los Gatos flour mill. Later it was taken over by the San Jose Water Company, and has given its service to them. As another landmark, Idylwild Inn stands almost forgotten by the outside world, but still proud of the many people of fame and importance for whom she provided rest and enjoyment. It is claimed that it was about in this spot that John C. Fremont camped on his famous visit to California.

The "Toll House" still stands in Los Gatos, though when they tore up the old turnpike toll road. This road was built by the Santa Cruz Turnpike Company and opened for travel in 1858. It continued to operate as a toll road until 1877, when it was turned over to the county. A charge of 25 cents was made for a team and buggy, and from that price on up, according to the size and load of the wagon. Even a foot passenger had to pay a toll of 10 cents.

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The old neglected orchards, sadly in need of care, still tempt young boys with their delicious fruit.

A huge oak tree scarred by the knives of many school boys, marks the spot where the first school of Alma once stood. There is also part of the old fence which encircled the school.

Oil derricks are still to be found in this region to remind us of something that can never die.

At Lexington there are a few scattered buildings remaining, like the last leaves of the trees, still marking what was once the metropolis of this mountain area.

Where Alma college now stands was at one time the estate of Captain Stillman Knowles, San Francisco Vigilante's captain of 1856, who came to the mountains in 1886. He sold to James L. Flood in 1894. Flood made improvements on the place, building a \$15000 stable where he kept fine horses, and stocking the waters with trout. In 1906 Dr. Harry L. Tevis of San Francisco purchased this Flood estate. He employed from 25 to 100 people on his farm.

We, of Lexington, could hardly forget the kindness and generosity of Dr. Tevis, who always so willingly remembered us with donations.

WHO'S WHO

Our beautiful hills and ideal climate attract those who love nature.

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(Continued)

Thanks to Mr. Dennison, our little town of Alma is mentioned in "America's Who's Who". In 1904 Mr. Dennison bought a home above Alma, and in 1910 started an art school which lasted for two years. Later, Frank Ingerson, his former teacher and the superintendent of the American Arts and Crafts Exhibit at the Panama Pacific Exposition, joined him, and they now reside in their beautiful home at "Cathedral Oaks".

Richard Walton Tully, a playwright and dramatist, producer of "The Bird of Paradise", "Rose of the Rancho", and others, came here about 1910. He purchased the place that Yuhudi Menuhin now owns. As an avocation he here raised fine Arabian horses. He, with his charming wife, Eleanor Gates, who was also a writer, fully appreciated our hills.

Another to be early attracted here was Flora Haines Laughead, author of "The Man Who Was Guilty", and mother of the Lockheeds of automobile and airplane fame. These boys (Malcolm and Allen) both attended Lexington school, being noted at that time for their ambitious attempts to build automobiles, and remembered for their many visits to the blacksmith shop for the purpose of acquiring bolts, or whatever seemed necessary for the building of an automobile.

Yuhudi Menuhin, the great violinist, honored the people of this district last year by purchasing the old Tully

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place. The home will soon be under construction and the road is being built, so as to be ready for his coming in 1936. He has appeared in many public recitals in Paris, London and New York. The people of this locality are all prepared to welcome him back to his future home.

The organist Paul Carson also has decided to reside in our beautiful hills, having had a most attractive home built in Aldercroft Heights. He plays the pipe organ for the radio, charming hundreds with his music. We sincerely hope that he and his talented wife will like our hills enough to remain here.

Our district also boasts having a very wonderful landscape and portrait painter (Mr. H. A. Collins), whose studio is located in Vista Grande.

SCHOOL

Our Lexington School district is almost as old as the state of California, having been created August 2, 1859. Mr. John P. Henning gave one and one-half acres of his property along the Los Gatos Creek to be used for a school site. The lumber and work on the school were donated by various people in the district.

Across the road from the school was the Temperance Hall where church services, social gatherings, etc. were held.

According to a statement made by Mrs. Hall (formerly Elizabeth Henning), who attended the Lexington school when

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the very first school began, Mr. William Kennedy was the first teacher of our district. The second was one Mr. L. A. Sage from the east, and the third a quite elderly gentleman named Mr. Cole.

At that time there was no other school between San Jose and Santa Cruz. All the children attended the school of Lexington with its homemade, double-seated, redwood desks.

In this little school by the creek, the teacher furnished the instruction, the trees furnished the teacher with the means by which the instruction could be given to the pupils, and the creek provided a delightful swimming pool for the children.

This continued until 1911 when the school board thought it wise to make a trade with the San Jose Water Company, by which they exchanged the one and one-half acres by the creek for nearly three acres (2.937) which is the present school site.

In order to clear the title to the old school property, the San Jose Water Company found it necessary to bring the friendly suit against the school district. Judgment was rendered by the court August 2, 1911, giving quiet title to the property.

According to the trade, the Water Company paid for the building of our present school, which was erected in 1911. School opened that year with Miss Ione Jacobs as

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teacher.

Lexington continued a one-room school until 1928, when, because of increased enrollment, an addition was made to the school and a second teacher employed. That teacher was Mrs. Myrtella Nohl, who still starts us on our journey through the school years, turning us over for further instruction to Mrs. McDonald, who, after four more years of work, sends us away from Lexington.